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**CRAFTING ILLUSIONS:
FASHION AS A MEANS OF DECODING SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL HISTORY IN INTERWAR BUCHAREST**

Abstract: *This paper proposes an overview of the intertwined streams of cultural, political, economic and social aspects that made up the fashion-consuming women's interwar Bucharest, through the scope of fashion studies. For this, I will outline the extended methodological and conceptual scope which defines fashion studies in correlation with historical analysis. This wide range of research includes cultural anthropology, semiotics, sociology, cultural, gender and identity studies, adding to the technical, artistic, and philosophical implications already popular in pursuits of costume history. My paper will be centred around the idea of crafting illusions. I will use the word "craft" both in its magical and metaphysical sense, as in "witchcraft", but also suggesting all aspects of craftsmanship. Therefore, my study deals with the conception, production, dissemination, consumption, and interpretation of fashionability. Drawing from this double-meaning, crafting illusions means invoking an idealised reality of prosperity, success, and power, which can hide a less glamorous reality. It can also be weaponised, from social control to building a national image.*

I will thus use the methods of fashion studies to interpret how the elegant Bucharester myth was constructed in an era of great upheavals. I aim to illustrate the fashion studies methodological and conceptual frameworks as a valid method of research, which has already been recognised as such in Western academia as a full-fledged discipline blending media, design, humanities, science, marketing, and politics. I will juxtapose the images seen in fashionable touristic spaces, such as Calea Victoriei, to the grim realities of a world recovering from past

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trauma, soon to delve into a new disaster. This will allow a snapshot of interwar Romania's complexity through the lens of fashion.

Keywords: *fashion, interwar Bucharest, women, consumerism, myth, elegance.*

This paper aims to illustrate the wide scope of fashion studies, beyond the realms of costume history and sociology. I will outline the theoretical evolution of late-twentieth-century fashion theory until today conceptually and methodologically, until it was acknowledged as a genuine academic field, particularly in the West. I will also show how scholars from other fields tangentially dealing with fashion subjects progressed in the past decades into fully-fledged fashion theorists within specialised University departments. As a branch of cultural studies, fashion studies employ an interdisciplinary methodology and the themes can include the traditional artistic, historical and sociological aspects, but they mostly delve into gender or urban studies, semiotics, economy, science, medicine, anthropology, psychology, politics or industry-based subjects. Consequently, fashion studies are a generous field of research for both practice-based and theory-based academics, ranging from mainstream to marginal areas of interest. This is especially useful for spaces, like Romania, where this type of approach has been little used. I will therefore use examples from interwar Bucharest women's lives to demonstrate the adaptability and connectivity allowed through an innately multi-dimensional analysis. I will differentiate the theoretical evolution of fashion theory with I termed "craft of illusion", from the conceptual and philosophical approaches to the subject, the "illusion of craft". This is a wordplay on the idea that charm or glamour have evolved from connotations of witchcraft. Similarly, the word "craft" can signify both technical prowess and spell casting. As the fashion system is inherently based on illusion, on an eternal present that becomes past as soon as it is verbalised, I connected it to the idea of craft.

The Craft of Illusion

Writings dealing with fashion and dress beyond illustrated costume histories, begin with the nineteenth century. Perspectives

habitually took a philosophical, moralising route, which can explain the intense division between proponents and detractors until recently¹. Advocates for women's larger participation in public life vehemently opposed fashion and those who adhered by its fleeting rules. Specialised literature maintained a steady bias towards artistic or conceptual approaches, while its otherwise-assumed commercial aspect still largely ignored functioning as a "tacit hypothesis"², essentially bringing new or marginal items into the mainstream³, thus offering a platform for peripheral individuals, ideas and customs⁴. For Eastern Europe, its accessibility mirrored its pre-modern elites-masses differentiations, until new practices were readily adopted by those who wished to be 'modern', Western-like, and urban. In Greater Romania, this modernisation also applied to fashionable modifications to the national costumes, where contemporary styles blend with traditional motifs⁵.

The so-called "fashion classics"⁶ reflect the sociological and philosophical inquest throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries. Historian, mathematician, writer and philosopher Thomas Carlyle is one of the most famous, with his philosophical 1836 novel *Sartor Resartus*. In the second half of the nineteenth century, biologist, anthropologist and sociologist Herbert Spencer presented his "sartorial Protestantism" and evolutionary perspective. Economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen's economic and sociological investigation delved into the leisure class in 1899. Sociologist Georg Simmel

¹ Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2005, pp. 6-7.

² Monica Titton, "Fashion Criticism Unraveled: A Sociological Critique of Criticism in Fashion Media", in *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, vol. 3, January 2016, p. 211.

³ Paula von Wachenfeldt, "The Myth of Luxury in a Fashion World", in *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*, vol. 5, October 2018, p. 314.

⁴ Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century*, New Brunswick NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2001, p. 4.

⁵ Djurdja Bartlett, "Introduction to Dress and Fashion in East Europe, Russia, and the Caucasus", in Djurdja Bartlett, Pamela Smith (eds), *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Oxford, Berg, 2010, p. 6.

⁶ See Michael Carter, *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes*, Oxford and New York, Berg Publishers, 2003.

represented the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with a neo-Kantian perspective. Experimental psychologist and psychoanalyst John Carl Flügel filtered his early twentieth-century experience through experimental psychology and psychoanalysis. Author, art critic and historian James Laver used his expertise as a museum curator and art historian in tracing costume history throughout the twentieth century, until the mid-1970s. Fashion as a contemporary research subject reflects its visible practices, leading towards a purported “blurring of genres”, which occurred when academics from different specialities began migrating in its direction⁷. It extends beyond the so-called meta-theoretical attempts to answer ‘why’- questions⁸, to increasingly interdisciplinary, albeit more focused, studies on all aspects of the phenomenon. While the scholars themselves may be specialised in a particular field, fashion inquiry will always require a panoramic understanding. The narrower the focus, the higher the need for a proper methodological approach⁹.

In 1966, semiotician Roland Barthes described fashion as a paradoxical mechanism functioning on “the imitation that which has first shown itself as inimitable”. For this, he continued, it becomes a sociological interest as it illustrates patterns of social and cultural change, divorced from the traditional “stagnant nature of society” where dress is immutably coded and hierarchized¹⁰. Moreover, sociologist Joanne Entwistle contended that in ignoring the close connection between clothing and the body, leading to classical social theory’s failure to recognise the significance of dress¹¹. This link between modernity and its discontinuities has been further examined by sociologist Anthony

⁷ Heike Jenss, “Locating Fashion/Studies: Research Methods, Sites and Practices”, in Heike Jenss (ed), *Fashion Studies: Research Methods, Sites and Practices*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 2-3.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

⁹ Agnès Rocamora and Anneke Smelik, “Thinking Through Fashion: An Introduction”, in Agnès Rocamora, Anneke Smelik (eds), *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2015, p. 3.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, Andy Stafford, Michael Carter (eds), Andy Stafford (tran), Oxford and New York, Berg, 2006, p. 91.

¹¹ Joanne Entwistle, “The Dressed Body”, in Linda Welters, Abby Lillethun (eds), *The Fashion Reader*, Oxford, Berg, 2014, p. 139.

Giddens as a crucial step in defining its “world-embracing” progress. Its dynamism results from separating time and space, a so-called “disembedding of social systems”. Social relations are similarly reflexively ordered and reordered continuously, based on individual and collective inputs¹². This also implies the differentiation indicated by sociologist Yuniya Kawamura between ‘fashion’ with all its intricacies, and ‘clothing’, identified chiefly with textile materials and their usage¹³.

In 1975 American art and costume historian Anne Hollander published her book *Seeing through Clothes*, a comprehensive account of dress in Western art history, juxtaposed to everyday clothes¹⁴. Ten years later, academic and writer Elizabeth Wilson published her seminal book *Adorned in Dreams*, on the complex relationship between fashion and modernity, aiming to illustrate dress as a multi-layered process laden with ambiguities. It was intended as an explorative, yet the polemic response to an already bygone era, “when feminist debates were still being passionately argued through, to contest the view that fashion is anti-feminist”, as explained in the Foreword to its revised 2000s edition¹⁵. The book marked a turning point not only for fashion research, but for the perception of the phenomenon in general, both in its creative and destructive sense¹⁶. Fashion became a matter of etymological investigation. As fashion studies professor Heike Jenss pointed out, the Latin variations of ‘moda’ or ‘mode’, also in its ‘modality’ sense, can be etymologically linked to ‘modern’ and ‘modernity’¹⁷. As a recognized progeny of modernity, fashion’s origin can be traced to the early capitalist city structures, as “the first crucible” of a “contradiction between the secularity of capitalism and the asceticism of Judeo-Christian culture”, belonging to “a distinct subtype of modern societies

¹² Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2015, pp. 16-17.

¹³ Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ See Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1993, p. xi.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2010, p. vii-viii.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. x.

¹⁷ Jenss, “Locating Fashion/Studies”, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

in general”¹⁸. Capitalist systems thus present several institutional features: a strongly competitive and expansionist enterprise order, the economy’s isolation from other social areas and polity. The state’s autonomy relies on “capital accumulation, over which its control is far less than complete”. Social classifications and regulated coordination developed towards an individualised manifestation, Giddens argued, without precedent in pre-modern history¹⁹.

Historically, the idea of fashionability precedes capitalism, and its origin has been traced in fashion histories around the mid-fourteenth century²⁰. Silent film, fashion, and theatre historian Linda Walters called attention to the importance of understanding the pre-modern and non-Western sartorial practices, particularly in the context of postmodernity’s constant references to them. Furthermore, Walters continued, textiles have always played a crucial role in both the private and the public spheres. High demands for ‘exotic’ materials even commonly informed economic legislation and diplomacy. Walters also deemed it as an essential factor in the capitalist system, as “fashion innovation follows power and money”. As the bourgeoisie grew in numbers and influence, their filtering of court fashions was further disseminated on the working classes²¹. But the subject’s intertwined multi-dimensionality must be acknowledged as a prerequisite of contemporary dedicated research. Dress and textile historian Hilary Davidson proposed an “embodied turn”, as an attempt to convert what she termed as ‘dress knowledge’ from implicit to explicit through reconstruction²².

Fashion’s ambiguous and often-self-effacing nature make it a “modernist irony” as among the most accessible and flexible means of expression²³. Wilson’s perspective drew from Matei Călinescu’s idea of an “irreversible split” between pre-industrial transcendence and modern commodity ideals. This would account for the hostility between

¹⁸ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

²⁰ Linda Walters, “Introduction”, in Linda Walters, Abby Lillethun (eds), *The Fashion Reader*, Oxford, Berg, 2014, p. 3.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

²² Hilary Davidson, “The Embodied Turn: Making and Remaking Dress as an Academic Practice”, *Fashion Theory*, vol. 23, no. 3, May 2019, pp. 331-332.

²³ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

modernity and modernism, constantly revolting against social and economic norms. Unlike many of its neighbours, where modernism was a key tool in nation-building, interwar Romania presented itself as a Latin nation of Orthodox rite, blending Western culture with Eastern European heritage²⁴. As a system, fashion bridges these tensions, offering a deeper perspective as “a crucial medium for the construction of signs for changing desires and consumption patterns”. Consequently, it articulates how definitions of beauty follow the characteristic fluidity of modernity²⁵. For Wilson, fashion as a practice is akin to photography as they share a liminal quality in terms of their artistic, identity, and temporal localisation in a perpetual creation of nostalgia²⁶.

On a cultural level, however, fashion history has been intrinsically connected to women’s histories. Fashion itself seemed to become a means of oppression, of keeping women away from active life, especially as the nineteenth century deepened gendered boundaries. As in all fields, women’s representation in interwar Romania was chiefly through a male gaze and not always enchanted by sight of beauty and elegance. In 1936, writer Alexandru Nora decried fashion’s capricious dictatorship and women’s efforts to submit to as a fruitless pursuit. As it lacked any principle in its changeability, fashion was for him deleterious to human intelligence through its mass-spreading tendency²⁷. Not all disparagers, nonetheless, were against dressing up. Fashion could, for some, transform into a tool of professional and social self-assertion²⁸. Fashion theorist Annamari Vänskä observed that from a posthumanist standpoint ‘anti-fashion’ proponents claim to save it from its ‘crisis’. There was no identifiable calamity looming on the fashion industry. ‘Anti’ implies this stance cannot exist on its outside of what it means to repudiate. Lastly, she pointed out a misunderstanding of what ‘critical’

²⁴ S. A. Mansbach, “The «Foreignness» of Classical Modern Art in Romania”, in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 80, no. 3, September 1998, p. 534.

²⁵ Elizabeth Wilson, “Fashion and Modernity”, in Christopher Breward, Caroline Evans (eds), *Fashion and Modernity*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2005, pp. 11-12.

²⁶ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, op.cit., p. vii.

²⁷ Alexandru Nora, *Femeia Ne e Stăpână. Adulter Sau Nu? / The Woman Is Our Master. Adultery or Not?*, Bucharest, Timpul, 1936, pp. 116-119.

²⁸ Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, op.cit., pp. 11-12.

entails, in assuming its only sense is as a negative judgement, instead of an objective evaluation²⁹. On the other hand, writer and publicist Lucrezia Kar³⁰ was also an accomplished fashion columnist for *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată* (*Our Illustrated Gazette*). Each issue, in her column titled *Moda văzută de Lucrezia Kar* (*Fashion as Seen by Lucrezia Kar*), presented the latest trends thematically or chronologically. Interwar Romanian fashion columns also competed in creativity and a certain humorously endearing way of titling themselves. For instance, the dedicated fashion column in every *Ilustrațiunea Română* (*The Illustrated Reality*) issue always included “Allo! Allo! Aci Parisul” (*Hello! Hello! Paris Here*) to its *Fashion* main title.

In his 2003 book *Fashion*, historian Christopher Breward described it as the result of a “precarious marriage between processes of creative authorship, technological production, and cultural dissemination”. As a solution, he proposed a “coherent and comprehensive overview” reconciling notions of fashion as “idea, object, and image”³¹. Contrasting the hierarchical implications of clothing in non-Western, traditional customs, our current understanding of the matter implies a constant innovative act that can then be contextualised to explain the development of certain ‘looks’ through broader external influences³². Yet, traditional or indigenous dress may not only be a fossilized way of dressing, but a closer glance at national or regional costume histories can also unearth similarities between these practices and Western fashion modernity³³. If viewed from a Eurocentric perspective, fashion has followed colonial models of centre and

²⁹ Annamari Vänskä, “How to Do Humans with Fashion: Towards a Posthuman Critique of Fashion”, in *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, vol. 5, April 2018, p. 18.

³⁰ Abbreviation of her surname, Karnabatt.

³¹ Christopher Breward, *Fashion*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 14-15.

³² Breward, *Fashion*, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

³³ Penelope Francks, “Was Fashion a European Invention? The Kimono and Economic Development in Japan”, in *Fashion Theory*, vol. 19, no. 3, June 2015, p. 354.

periphery, using ‘exotic’ ideas³⁴, but never incorporating their true meanings, or in many cases acknowledging their inspiration source. This ‘exotic’ dimension can also apply to ‘glamour’, where unattainability is preferred. Glamour thus becomes a special effect, a visual cue which is best admired from a distance, similarly to the foreign Other³⁵. Following a trend set by the Royal Family, the Romanian national costume became a statement, not in terms of fashionability and national identity.

While fashion studies constitute an inherently interdisciplinary methodology, it relies on concepts borrowed from anthropology, linguistics, psychology, cultural studies, semiotics or sociology. The fashion system appears to be self-conscious in parodying itself for its very inconsistency, while simultaneously taking itself seriously³⁶. This Janus-faced interpretation is also reflected in the way in which fashion is perceived and represented from the outside. The growing systematization of design and craft, along with state reforms in uniformizing education and within the art versus industry debate. Since the late 1960s, fashion has gradually been treated as a serious academic subject³⁷. This meant specialised schools, colleges and universities created entire departments for all relevant aspects. Romania’s academic interest is focused on design, within the areal of visual arts blended with the textile industry, with a decades-long tradition of textile design specialisations in universities of national prestige³⁸. Practical tailoring training was an older national priority, which even preceded Greater Romania. The Romanian Tailoring Academy was founded in 1908, with a hiatus during World War I, until its dissolution as an institution after World War II. In the 1930s, it published a collection of tailoring manuals on all relevant subjects, synthesized in a portable form as the *Călăuza Croitorului* (*The*

³⁴ Luz Neira García, “The Centre of the Periphery in Fashion Studies: First Questions”, in *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, April 2018, p. 96.

³⁵ Dita Svelte, “«Whether Witches Can by Some Glamour Change Men into Beasts»: Wit and the Seductive Glamour of Fashion”, in *Fashion Theory*, November 2019, pp. 7-8.

³⁶ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, op.cit., p. 10.

³⁷ Breward, *Fashion*, op.cit., pp. 58-59.

³⁸ Constantin Oros, *Pagini din istoria costumului / Pages from Costume History*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia, 1998, p. 240.

Tailor's Guide)³⁹, all authored by then-director of the Academy, D. Theodorescu. Training tailors professionally remained a state-sanctioned pursuit, and by the 1970s, training and design merged to form what is now universally termed as fashion design⁴⁰.

The theoretical treatment of fashion is not necessarily congruent with the wider texts published on the subject, from illustrated monographs of costume history, glossy magazine articles, catalogues, or coffee-table picture books. Christopher Breward pointed out that such materials shared an appeal that is “visual and descriptive rather than discursive”. They play an “avowedly promotional” role, especially when considering their sources: fashion journalists and ghost-writers with a vetted interest, often designers themselves. While they remain a valid research pursuit, Breward added, such materials would illustrate “the rapaciously commercial spirit of the culture in which directional fashion is produced than any number of more abstract ‘academic’ treatises”⁴¹. Fashion scholar and culture critic Monica Titton called attention to the co-dependency between the fashion industry and its dedicated media. This generated an “economic symbiosis”, preventing fashion criticism as presented in fashion journalism from reaching the same respectability as art or literary criticism⁴². Fashion magazines then occupy a border space in representing fashion items as utilitarian and identity markers, delineated by Roland Barthes as a volatile collation of both signifiers and the signifieds⁴³. The major interwar Bucharest book and magazine sellers like *I.G. Hertz* continuously assured their potential clients of their varied national and international stocks for all interests and budgets through ads in all important periodicals. These ads either presented a general situation in accordance with the article they accompanied with prices, or they had complete lists with magazine titles and their prices. One such ad was placed next to an article delineating the winter fashion trends for

³⁹ See D. Theodorescu, *Călăuza Croitorului*. “Carnetul General de Măsuri Proporționate”. *Stabilit Pentru Sistemele de Croeala Proprii*. / *The Tailor's Guide*. “General Proportionate Measures Notebook”. *Established for Specific Tailoring Systems*, Bucharest, The “Tiparul Academic” Graphic Institute, 1935.

⁴⁰ Oros, *Pagini din istoria costumului*, op.cit., p. 257.

⁴¹ Breward, *Fashion*, op.cit., pp. 11-12.

⁴² Titton, *Fashion Criticism Unraveled*, op.cit., p. 213.

⁴³ Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, op.cit., p. 42.

1930 in *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*⁴⁴. According to the ad, *I.G. Hertz* sold patterns for dresses, mantles, coats, suits, blouses, skirts, or underwear for 69 lei⁴⁵ each at its Calea Victoriei store. Later, in August of the same year, the gazette outlined the *I.G. Hertz* offer⁴⁶ for fashion journals with a wide array of models for men, women and children. Their prices ranged from 90 lei⁴⁷, for *Silhouettes Enfant* with a variety of models for children, to 400 lei⁴⁸ for a large *Gentleman Album*. The most expensive journal for women was *Coming Season*, sold for 360 lei⁴⁹.

Personal collections embody another aspect of literature dedicated to fashion, also visible in Romania through museum-type settings and catalogues, along with the noted individuals managing them. However, curator, fashion historian and creative consultant Amy de la Haye highlighted a strong inclination in specialised research to only consider articles that are no longer used⁵⁰. Once a collection has been identified as such, it endows its owner with a higher degree of responsibility for the care, display and representation of each object, and the entire assortment. Nevertheless, the language used in collection studies remains predominantly ingrained into patriarchal stereotypes, often with Freudian connotations when describing the reasons behind such pursuits⁵¹. Dedicated albums and exhibitions, however, are limited in time, even if the custodians do their best to conserve all items. Fashion and costume history albums based on photographs usually begin around the seventeenth century, informed by the availability of well-preserved outfits⁵². A pertinent example blending an art history perspective and an extensive personal collection is art historian and critic Adina Nanu. She

⁴⁴ “Moda în timpul iernii / Fashion for Wintertime” and *I.G. Hertz* ad, in *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, III.133, 1 February 1930, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Around RON 27, amounting to \$0.4, \$6.3 today.

⁴⁶ *I.G. Hertz* Ad, *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, III.162, 21 August 1930, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Around RON 33, amounting to \$0.5, \$7.5 today.

⁴⁸ Around RON 156, amounting to \$2.4, \$36 today.

⁴⁹ Around RON 143, amounting to \$2.2, \$33 today.

⁵⁰ Amy de la Haye, “A Critical Analysis of Practices of Collecting Fashionable Dress”, in *Fashion Theory*, vol. 22, no. 4–5, September 2018, p. 383.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 386–388.

⁵² See Mairi Mackenzie,isme: *Să înțelegem moda / ...isms: Understanding Fashion*, Olivia Carmen Birsășteanu (tran), Bucharest, Rao, 2010, p. 6.

has also been a professor at the Bucharest National University of Arts and the "I.L. Caragiale" National University of Theatre and Film. Her 1976 book *Artă, Stil, Costum (Art, Style, Costume)*, translated into English in 1981, and re-edited in a hardcover, glossy illustrated form in 2007 has been presented as "the first and only universal costume history written in Romania"⁵³.

Fashion thus evolved from a niche 'feminine' concern to a "specialized mode of scholarship" since the 1960s, beginning in British and American academic environments⁵⁴. Courses and degrees in fashion studies now extend beyond the Anglo-Saxon sphere, throughout the world, particularly in Europe (Italy, Scandinavia) or Asia, where its methodology is applied to the analysis of historical, current, or futuristic fashions. Such studies treat dress as a key cultural marker which both differentiates and unites communities. Fashion theorists have continued pursuing the subject even when it was not 'fashionably respectable' within the confines of the predominantly 'masculinist' academic rejection of so-called "women's subjects"⁵⁵. Due to this growing scholarly interest in the subject, scholarly articles have appeared in a wide range of peer-reviewed journals, which eventually assured the creation of specialised journals. Among these, the most prominent is *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*⁵⁶, founded by fashion historian and curator Valerie Steele, also its editor-in-chief, and the director of the Fashion Museum of Technology (FIT) in New York. According to Elizabeth Wilson, it "has provided a much needed platform for the publication of new research"⁵⁷. Particularly following the 2010s, the fashion peer-reviewed journal market is wider, alongside the trade- and craft-specific pursuits. They include the above-mentioned *Fashion Theory*, along with *The Fashion Studies Journal*, *the International Journal of Fashion Studies*, or the *International Journal of Fashion*

⁵³ Adina Nanu, *Artă, Stil, Costum / Art, Style, Costume*, Bucharest, Noi Media Print, 2007, cover 4.

⁵⁴ Breward, *Fashion, op.cit.*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ William J.F. Keenan, "Introduction: «Sartor Resartus» Restored: Dress Studies in Carlylean Perspective", in William J.F. Keenan (ed), *Dressed to Impress. Looking the Part*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2001, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Initially under Berg publishers, now under Routledge.

⁵⁷ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams, op.cit.*, p. ix.

Design, Technology and Education. Such publications offer a platform for detailed theoretical or context-based research, but where Romanian fashion has been only marginally represented. Consequently, there is a fertile ground for a variety of subjects regarding Romanian dress practices and fashion history.

The key locations in modern fashion have been diversified throughout the years, but they always return or refer to their origin point, Paris. Fashionability and modernity determined the status of fashion capital. Closing in on Paris, London, New York, Milan, and later Hollywood blended metropolitan culture with a sense of freshness, in its essence an antithesis of anything 'old', hence obsolete. Its perpetually current character, however, contrasts the tendency for city centres to attempt to freeze certain frames in time. The passers-by, particularly tourists, no longer share the styles and behavioural patterns of those who lived when the "embalmed" urban space was constructed, offer a new dimension for research⁵⁸. As women began to occupy an increasing amount of public cityspace, the so-called "urban crowd" began to be invested with feminine traits⁵⁹. According to fashion and textile professor Jennifer Craik, this categorization also extended to the fashion model, as an illustration, intended for women, namely housewives⁶⁰. As Elizabeth Wilson explained, this inclination was especially visible in early-twentieth-century fashion consumption. Urbane fashion thus becomes a tool of creating the desirable city myth, ignoring its inherent contradictions and inequalities⁶¹. In this way, the fashionable interwar Bucharester created her own image within the public cityspaces, as a treat for herself, but also as a ravishing sight by Romanian men and foreign visitors alike.

⁵⁸ Idem, "Urbane Fashion", in Christopher Breward, David Gilbert (eds), *Fashion's World Cities*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2006, p. 36.

⁵⁹ Idem, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, London, Virago Press, 1991, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion. Cultural Studies in Fashion*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 69-70.

⁶¹ Breward, *Fashion, op.cit.*, p. 171.

The Illusion of Craft

As a cultural product, fashion is a language, endowed with complex linguistic structures and classifications. For Elizabeth Wilson, fashion's language is "coherent in its ambiguity", is Capitalism in both its destructive and constructive manifestations⁶². Philosophy, design, and innovation researcher Jamie Brassett differentiated fashion as entropy, from 'fashioning' as emergence defined around the theories of chaos and complexity, using stars and constellations as a comparison⁶³. The story of dress can be described as a visual chronicle of a moment in time, an era, with its realities, intricacies, or contradictions⁶⁴. Consequently, fashion provides a wider area of investigation, which includes its traditionally attributed material significations, from where it grows⁶⁵. Cultural theorist Ben Highmore considered such an approach as an example of what could happen if fashion theory was viewed "from a perspective that is astronomical in proportions". This would expand the understanding of fashion as a facet of cultural studies⁶⁶. Jean Baudrillard viewed the modern commercial exchange process as a finite, mechanical interaction between the "mobile, inconsistent individual, with his needs, his conflicts and his negativity" and "the codified, classified, discontinuous and relatively consistent system of products in all their positivity". Shopping thus becomes a means of obtaining items to gratify needs as a "system for procuring satisfaction", which is for Baudrillard not a language but an inventory, as it lacks syntax⁶⁷. It is spoken through

⁶² Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

⁶³ Jamie Brassett, "Entropy (Fashion) and Emergence (Fashioning)", in Christopher Breward, Caroline Evans (eds), *Fashion and Modernity*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2005, pp. 197–209.

⁶⁴ Mary Lynn Damhorst, "Introduction", in Mary Lynn Damhorst, Kimberly A. Miller-Spillman, Susan O. Michelman (eds), *The Meaning of Dress*, New York, Fairchild Publications, 2005, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Ben Highmore, "Response to: Entropy (Fashion) and Emergence (Fashioning)", Christopher Breward, Caroline Evans (eds), *Fashion and Modernity*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2005, p. 212.

⁶⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, James Benedict (tran), London and New York, Verso, 2005, p. 205.

artifice and subtleties and oftentimes innuendos. Illusion can also be sensed, depending on the level of engagement. According to Baudrillard, illusion is inherently connected to absence, as it primarily refers to appearance⁶⁸. The intangible quality of fashion makes it a perfect instrument for a deeper understanding of cultural, social, economic and political inner-workings⁶⁹.

As a practice, dress must also acknowledge the relationship between the garment and the body which it closely covers. It is a second skin marking the self-other boundary, utilising the body's nature and aspect depends on the technique used⁷⁰. Elizabeth Wilson asserted that the common anxiety about urban growth in nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries specialised literature, exclusively referred to the Western city. These writings eventually extended to the "fast-growing cities of the 'third world', to their great detriment"⁷¹. Wilson explained that the functions it fulfils can be reasoned through practical, psychological, or aesthetic filters, which can apply to all forms of clothing. But when certain clothing items or styles are deemed either appropriate or inappropriate, any deviation, sartorial or in body shape and size is vehemently criticised, ostracized, and in extreme cases violently punished⁷². The modern, Western concept of 'fashion' departs from the basic tenets of dress, to include elements of capitalism and urbanisation, as a continuous sartorial renewal⁷³.

Romanian beauty and fashion literature, both in periodical and book form, offered detailed advice of adapting fashion to appearance. The basic premise was that body type was crucial in choosing outfits. The shape of the face, hair colour, or height thus determined the type of cuts, hems and even the length of a dress or suit. The latter would also be considered the most important part of an interwar woman's wardrobe⁷⁴,

⁶⁸ Baudrillard, *Fragments*, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

⁶⁹ Rocamora and Smelik, "Thinking Through Fashion", *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Entwistle, "The Dressed Body", *op.cit.*, p. 138.

⁷¹ Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

⁷² Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice", in *Fashion Theory*, vol. 4, no. 3, August 2000, p. 324.

⁷³ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-5.

⁷⁴ Michelle, "Moda, doamnă! / Fashion, Madam!", in *Realitatea Ilustrată*, IV.160, 20 February 1930, p. 20.

as her beloved and practical piece for walks and shopping⁷⁵. Blondes were advised to opt for black, navy, chocolate brown, golden brown, dark green, azure, nuit, and should avoid red or fresh green. Darker hair allowed for a larger array of possibilities, including black, navy, deep brown, all dark accents, but also shades of white, beige, naturelle, green, blue, red, brique, purple, and all modern strong colours. Brown hair worked for ebony highlights, while maroon would only be allowed for light auburn hair, provided it can be highlighted by a more golden tone. Some brunettes can wear flowery toques in pastel tones, but the choice should make artistic sense⁷⁶.

Fashion constantly refers to identity, reflecting the continuous tensions between the individual and the crowd, adding a social and political dimension to the act of defining what a person 'is' at a certain moment in time⁷⁷. Playing on the inherent globalisation tendency of modernity⁷⁸, fashion became a worldwide phenomenon. By the interwar era, the differentiation between the traditional costume and the fashionable, arguably Western, styles subsided in intensity. This was aided by the sheer practicality and ease of obtaining 'modern' clothing items and models but was pushed by the underlying necessity for social acceptance through conformity. Modern women, however, could also pose a threat to the State, particularly during the interwar increasingly dictatorial regimes. Their independence and self-assertion challenged the patriarchal status quo, which encouraged some public participation, but always in the background, offering support or nurturing the future of the nation⁷⁹. In Greater Romania's case, accelerating the modernisation process also served the purpose of national reinvention for boosting Romania's positive image. Modern women were treated less as an enemy of the state, and more as potential assets. For instance, the

⁷⁵ Laura, "Moda de primăvară / Spring Fashion", in *Realitatea Ilustrată*, III.17, 20 April 1929, p. 15.

⁷⁶ See R. Vior, *Fii frumoasă doamnă / Be Beautiful, Madam*, Bucharest, Cartea Românească, 1938, pp. 210-212.

⁷⁷ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, op.cit., p. 12.

⁷⁸ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, op.cit., p. 63.

⁷⁹ See Alys Eve Weinbaum et al, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device: Collaboration, Connective Comparison, Multidirectional Citation", in Alys Eve Weinbaum et al (eds), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2008, p. 15.

winners for both *Miss Romania* pageants, from *Realitatea Ilustrată* and *Ilustrațiunea Română*, were marketed throughout the written press as “the ambassadors of Romanian beauty”. In both cases, they were sent abroad to prove Romania’s evolution as a modern, Westernised state. Apart from international-level events, interwar Romanian magazines routinely set up their own thematic beauty contests. An example spanning a longer duration was the 1929 “photogenic beauties” contest organized by *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată* with a different hair colour in each issue. It functioned both as a regular photo spread edited by A Stoika Clococanu, and a less visible means of casting female roles for the upcoming cinema adaptation of poet and playwright Victor Eftimiu’s *Înșir’te mărgărite* (*String Yourself together Pearls*), also the magazine’s founder and editor-in-chief.

The interwar era introduced a new meaning for the word ‘glamour’, departing from its sorcery or charming by magic, to connote a feminine, diva type of persona. In this sense, ‘glamour’ was a characteristic associated chiefly with the representation of female movie stars during the so-called classical Hollywood era, from the 1930s to the 1950s⁸⁰. This followed earlier models of “opulence and display of the theatre and demi-monde, in Orientalism and the exotic, and modernity” to demonstrate “sexual sophistication”⁸¹. This era also coincided with the crystallization of the ‘modern girl’ type⁸², whose name was translated and adapted in each local or national language, sharing an attitude that blended emancipation with seduction. Greta Garbo was the most popular feminine ideal which lasted throughout the interwar era. Greater Romania was enamoured by her and what she represented. In 1930, *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată* even declared actress Maria Mohor as “Romania’s Greta Garbo” as she was preparing to transition to cinema⁸³. Two years later, an unsigned article in the same magazine explored the

⁸⁰ Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour. Women, History, Feminism.*, London and New York, Zed Books, 2011, p. 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸² Weinbaum et al., “The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device”, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁸³ N. Munteanu, “De vorbă cu Greta Garbo a României” / “A Conversation with the Romanian Greta Garbo”, in *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, 24 July 1930, pp. 13-14.

influence Garbo played on Hollywood and the divas who followed her on the silver screen. According to the anonymous article, Garbo was no longer a simple actress or woman, she is “a form, a symbol” in her attitude and how she portrayed her characters. The article also detailed Garbo’s influence on known stars, including Marlene Dietrich⁸⁴.

Social historian Carol Dyhouse defined glamour as a “sophisticated feminine allure” in close connection with the twentieth century redefining of fashion, consumption, and popular and celebrity culture⁸⁵. This femininity is, nevertheless, a gendered feature acquired through consumerism and cultural conditioning, which is only partially interchangeable with the quality of being ‘female,’ referring to biological identity⁸⁶. Knowledge and understanding in the field have been traditionally expressed through gendered biases. While men were labelled as ‘connoisseurs’, driven by strategy and reason, women were “often portrayed as indiscriminate consumers of bibelots”⁸⁷. With the shifts in defining the masculine and the feminine since the Enlightenment, gendered differentiation was also expressed in how individuals were described. Men were identified by occupation and assessing accomplishments, women by clothing, which implied adherence to style and beauty standards⁸⁸. Masculine fashion details had begun being adopted by women after World War I, as an attempt to display the young women’s will for liberation, by renouncing their femininity in favour of a boyish, more practical look. Menswear, however, was slower to become commonplace in full, outside of their intended original purpose. Women’s trousers were seldom if ever mentioned out of the pyjamas, work or sportive contexts, but playing with gendered clothes ceased to be a George Sand-like curiosity. In the Western and Westernized world, the sight of women leisurely donning trousers was acceptable, suggesting significant steps in women’s emancipation. While women walking on the street wearing trousers was

⁸⁴ “După chipul și asemănarea ei. Pe urmele Gretei” / “In Her Own Image. On Greta’s Footsteps”, in *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, 1 March 1932, pp. 27–28.

⁸⁵ Dyhouse, *Glamour*, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Craik, *The Face of Fashion*, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

⁸⁷ de la Haye, “A Critical Analysis of Practices of Collecting Fashionable Dress”, *op.cit.*, p. 387.

⁸⁸ Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

far from being a routine sight in interwar Bucharest, respectable women routinely posed in men's attires, with the obligatory cosmetic and accessories additions.

While 'glamour' shares several commonalities with 'fashion', the two terms are not necessarily synonymous. 'Glamour' primarily implied excess and luxury through "power, sexuality and transgression" and to "pleasure, the sensuousness of fur, silk and rich fabrics, the heady sensuality and reveries of perfume"⁸⁹. Romanian specialists assumed the new standards of femininity as they remained perfectly compatible with the generalised health and hygiene movements throughout the interwar era. For instance, in his high-quality print hard-cover manual *Fii frumoasă doamnă (Be Beautiful, Madam)*, self-proclaimed specialist R.Vior did not seem to add any moral implications to cleavages, provided they enhanced positive physical traits or hid flaws. Low or heart-shaped cuts were recommended for masking a short neck or an unflattering décolletage, short women would look ridiculous with a neckline⁹⁰. D. Theodorescu also noted that skirts could be as short as the fashion required, provided the wearer had beautiful legs⁹¹. Popular opinion on skirt length, however, was important enough to warrant an extensive survey of *Realitatea Ilustrată* readers in 1930, asking their preferences and reasonings for the chance to win a prize. The polling found that short skirts had equal supporters and detractors. While invoking moral arguments for long skirt had been declining. According to the unnamed reporter, the short skirt remains the best fit for modern life, for the frantic *Charleston* moves, for the 'amazing' automobile speeds reaching 120 kilometres per hour, amid a life of always on a fast pace. The modern woman could no longer spend an hour grooming before work, or the time needed to collect her unending dusty train from the sidewalk. Even more convincingly in the defence of short skirts, they use less fabric, so the expenses are proportionally lower. The general tone and featured answers, however, signal a bias towards longer skirts, playing on the assumption that women should keep their bodies hidden

⁸⁹ Dyhouse, *Glamour*, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

⁹⁰ R. Vior, *Fii frumoasă doamnă / Be Beautiful, Madam*, Bucharest, Cartea Românească, 1938, pp. 210-212.

⁹¹ Theodorescu, *Călăuza Croitorului*, *op.cit.*, pp. 106-107.

lest their 'feminine' mystery would disappear. The investigation featured a jury who voted for the best original comment. The winner, Jenny Argeșanu, received a "Monica" sports suit from the *Solavici* store⁹². The only application for shame in fashion was hence related to physical appearance and how the wearer blended her personality with the context. Women were advised to employ a severe self-critique about their body, personality and outfit choices, with extensive examinations in the mirror, the only efficient way to discover one's personality⁹³.

The feminine stereotypes used in film included the vamp, evolved from the 1920s siren⁹⁴, as the ultimate glamorous diva. This modern reimagining of the ideal feminine, originating from the Parisian fashion scene, could be viewed as the equivalent of the dandy or *flâneur* in Baudelaire's time. The 'modern woman' became the "social, political, intellectual, and technological changes that shaped daily life in bourgeois Western urban centres"⁹⁵. As the city woman began to roam the city streets herself, she evolved into the *flâneuse*. Stylish interwar Bucharesters happily adopted the *flâneuse* image and used the street and public city spaces as fashion parades, while also playing the role of the jury for their peers and rivals. Artist, writer and science teacher Graziella Doicescu remembered their elegance "on their high heels, with translucent silk stockings, with expensive dresses and furs". They wore perfume, modern makeup, and carefully styled their hair, according to the latest fashions. In Doicescu's words, one could observe "models from American films right on Bucharest's streets"⁹⁶.

The early twentieth century also hosted a wide array of incarnations for the 'new woman' or 'new girl' standards⁹⁷. From a Foucauldian perspective, this new feminine ideal represented a

⁹² "Rochie lungă sau scurtă?" / "Long or Short Dress?", in *Realitatea Ilustrată*, IV.157, 30 January 1930, p. 28.

⁹³ Vior, *Fii frumoasă doamnă*, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 56.

⁹⁵ Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, "Becoming Modern: Gender and Sexual Identity after World War I", Whitney Chadwick, Tirza True Latimer (eds), in *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars*, New Brunswick NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2003, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Graziella Doicescu, *Captivantul București interbelic: tablete / The Captivating Interwar Bucharest: Tablets*, Bucharest, Vremea, 2008, p. 123

⁹⁷ Weinbaum et al, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device", in *op.cit.*, p. 8.

reinterpretation of the power idea, inversed on itself, yet unabashedly subservient to its underlying restrictive functions. Terminologically, the 'new woman' was an 1890s creation and had social and political connotations⁹⁸, while the 'modern girl' with short hair and skirts emerged in the 1920s as the *garçonne* in France, also known as the flapper in the Anglo-Saxon world. However, the girl-woman pair chose distinct paths of expenditure⁹⁹. The new strategies were centred around the modern woman as a purported 'ultimate consumer', as a means of capitalising on newly gained freedoms and their subsequent possibilities. The lines between *haute couture* and street fashion became increasingly blurred¹⁰⁰, but the former maintained its slower pace in responding to street-level style changes. As fashion historian and researcher Djurdja Bartlett noted, high fashion preserved its original mid-nineteenth-century exclusivist and escapist ideals enunciated by Worth, in displaying luxurious garments which would transport the wearer and observer outside of their immediate surroundings¹⁰¹. Yet its scope weakened as mass fashions gained terrain. At the beginning of the phenomenon, the roughly 70 couturier houses ran profitable businesses. Today roughly 11 companies remain, which see little to no return of their creative and material investments. Fashion houses which wish to release *haute couture* collections must license their brand and names to *prêt-à-porter*, accessories and cosmetics divisions or companies¹⁰². *Haute couture* transcends the utilitarian aspect of everyday fashion, which also implies a magical dimension close, the visible manifestation of how illusions are crafted without any expectation for real-world applicability.

In 1923, the bilingual *Almanach du Hihg-Life (High-Life Almanac)* for all stylish Bucharest, published by *L'Independance Roumaine* in French, for Romanian readers. The article titled *La mode*

⁹⁸ See Mary Louise Roberts, "Making the Modern Girl French: From New Woman to Éclaireuse", in Alys Eve Weinbaum et al (eds), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, Next wave, Durham, Duke University Press, 2008, p. 78.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 92.

¹⁰⁰ Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety*, op.cit., p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Djurdja Bartlett, "Glitz and Restraint - Paris *Haute couture* on Display", in *Fashion Theory*, vol. 18, no. 4, September 2014, p. 433.

¹⁰² Mackenzie, ...isme, op.cit., p. 138.

(*Fashion*) featured a five-page detailed account of 1922 styles and suggestions for the new year. The basic assumption was that, fashion being ephemeral, women are keenly interested in keeping abreast with its changes¹⁰³. The author, M.R., also mentioned several key French designers of interest, all with misspelt names. In this way, *Lanvin* was rewritten as 'Lauvin', or *Chanel* as 'Channel'¹⁰⁴. The Bucharest high life always received its due attention in newspapers like *Le Moment* (*The Moment*), a French-language daily dedicated to everything concerning the capital and its inhabitants. In 1937, a fashion reporter only known as Jacqueline, presented "one of the most successful" *haute couture* parades of the year at *Maison Lery* in Bucharest. While there were no in-house creations, the event featured collections from Maggy Rouff, *Maison Claire Godt*, *Rochasse*, *Patou*, Nina Ricci and *Lanvin*¹⁰⁵.

But these examples only represent the visible part of the fashion system. Fashion studies embrace all aspects of fashion and its legacy. As one of modernity's key descendants, our current understanding of fashion thus encompasses a multidimensional area of interest. Modernity can be construed as 'Western' or 'Westernized', or it can be linked to capitalism and liberal democracy concerning the so-called "fascist modernity", while other interpretations highlight its multiplicity. This lack of clarity in defining modernity can be the culprit of its now-documented failings, offering grand promises to which it never delivered¹⁰⁶. Fashion is similarly hesitant in providing clear delineations in scope and effects. Christopher Breward asserted that fashion's vastness generated two conflicting attitudes regarding the creative and social dimensions of fashion consumption¹⁰⁷. Industrialisation has changed fashion production by popularising ready-to-wear garments¹⁰⁸. Modernisation and Westernisation were applied in Central and Eastern

¹⁰³ M.R., "La mode / Fashion", in *Tout Bucarest. Almanach du High Life de L'Indépendance Roumaine / All of Bucharest. The High Life Almanac of L'Indépendance Roumaine*, Bucharest, Société par "L'Indépendance Roumaine", 1923, p. 65.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁵ Jacqueline, "Les collections de la haute couture bucarestoise / The Bucharest Haute Couture Collections", in *Le Moment*, Bucharest, 11 October 1937, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Weinbaum et al, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device", *op.cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁷ Breward, *Fashion*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 53.

Europe in tandem with increasingly stronger traditionalist and nationalist tendencies. This generated tension between the need to become urban and cosmopolitan for the new, modern woman, as she was expected to abide by the nostalgic bucolic ideals¹⁰⁹ brought by the redefining of national identity since the nineteenth century.

Romanian magazines also featured descriptive and informative fashion articles on general trends, beyond the local textile and commercial realities. In 1933, *Realitatea Ilustrată* presented the innovations that would mark the coming decade, as made for svelte and supple women whose sportive grace were feminized by the new lines¹¹⁰. By the end of the month, the same magazine's fashion column officially announced that fashion has radically changed. The skirts increased in length, requiring more fabric, the waist was raised significantly, and the hips were narrow. The author, Assunta, mentioned the widespread view that these shifts expressed a new feminine style. Dresses again emphasized the chest area, while women were now pressured to maintain small hips, or lose weight accordingly. Because of the new requirements for what the author called childish hips, the women will no longer walk, instead, they will trip. Even more, impressionist folds reminiscent of Renoir or Manet were revived under a stylized form through the lens of the experiences dress has gained throughout the past half-century. The new fashion seemed to only be accessible to the wealthier women, and she advised her readers against anything that may seem cheap or easily copied. Fur mantles were hence rarity in Paris or Berlin, due to the impossibility to identify the imitations¹¹¹. This belonged to the conceptual evolution from the slender *garçonne* of the 1920s, to the glamorous curvy woman of the 1930s.

While the modes of production and dissemination adapted to modernity, the dictatorial yet adored *createur* stereotype continued to thrive in an ever-changing environment of passionate consumerism. Like the meaning of an object is diluted proportionally as it is multiplied, the

¹⁰⁹ Bartlett, "Introduction", *op.cit.*, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ Yvette, "Ce se poartă" / "What Is Fashionable", in *Realitatea Ilustrată*, VII.312, January 1933, p. 24.

¹¹¹ Assunta, "Moda iarnă" / "Winter Fashion", in *Realitatea Ilustrată*, III.44, 26 October 1929, p. 31.

so-called “serial object” loses its technical and physical quality standards¹¹². Elizabeth Wilson argued that fashion mass production maintains an inconsistency, oscillating between the “politics of fashion” and fashion as an art form. Fashion thus suggests links “both to the evolution of styles that circulate in ‘high’ and Avant-Garde art; and to popular culture and taste”¹¹³. Jean Baudrillard highlighted the social class implications deeply rooted in the idea of style, in the qualitative and quantitative difference between the model, as an original creation, and its chain reproduction¹¹⁴. The advent of ready-made fashions now forced creators to grapple with creativity in an era of infinite reproduction¹¹⁵. Continuing models set by nineteenth-century creators like Charles Frederick Worth or pre-war paragon Paul Poiret, interwar fashion designers established an industrial-business dimension to their artistic and technical craft. Gabrielle ‘Coco’ Chanel built an empire still relevant today as the “paradigm of the twentieth-century style”. She transferred the appearance of changing social, political and economic norms of the early twentieth century to the runaway by inventing an apparently ‘poor look’. While the garments seemed to contradict everything *haute couture* was about, Chanel’s creations used the finest materials and were laden with precious gemstones and diamonds¹¹⁶.

Fashion habitually intersected with modernism. Beside the most cited example, Elsa Schiaparelli’s collaboration with Salvador Dalí, Sonia Delaunay, co-founder of Orphism alongside her partner Robert Delaunay became a celebrated 1920s fashion and interior designer with extended Parisian connections. She cultivated a close personal and professional friendship with noted Romanian-born Avant-Garde poet Tristan Tzara¹¹⁷ and Modernist dancer and later hatha-yoga pioneer in

¹¹² Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, *op.cit.*, p. 158.

¹¹³ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁴ Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, *op.cit.*, p. 161.

¹¹⁵ Andrew Bolton, “Response to: Multiple, Movement, Model, Mode: The Mannequin Parade 1900-1929”, in Christopher Breward, Caroline Evans (eds), *Fashion and Modernity*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2005, p. 150.

¹¹⁶ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, *op.cit.*, pp. 40-41.

¹¹⁷ Axel Madsen, *Sonia Delaunay: Artist of the Lost Generation*, New York, Open Road Media, 2015, p. 14.

Europe Lizica Codreanu, one of Constantin Brâncuși's dancing muses¹¹⁸. The interwar era thus offered an opportunity for artistic, yet current, designs rooted in escapism from industrial austerity. Beyond the recognisable figure of the fashion designer, modern fashion dissemination functions through personalities universally acclaimed as fashion and style icons. With the advent of the cinema and the crystallization of the film industry by the 1930s, this "fashion-oriented celebrity culture"¹¹⁹ extended its reach to the silver screen. Interwar women looked for inspiration to the grey-scaled movie star, as much as to the socialite photographed at lavish events or during her daily public outings. The black-and-white cinema image thus shaped Western tastes in texture, materials, and accessories¹²⁰. The Romanian cinema industry did not properly establish itself during the interwar era, and only a handful of films still survive today¹²¹. A crucial factor in this was the lack of official interest in cinema, save for state-backed propaganda films¹²² and a series of documentary-type pictures produced by the Romanian Sociological School through the effort of its founder, Dimitrie Gusti in the 1930s¹²³. Therefore, most of the cinema consumption in Romania was through Hollywood or the larger European cinema industries, namely Paris or Berlin.

But not only movie stars possessed the power of influencing masses in terms of behaviour and appearance. Departing from the theatricality customary for both literary and stage costumes, the much-simpler, intricately conceived film costume became a language in itself. It functions as a "performative code, investing heavily in imaginative and spectacular strategies" to move the spectator away from the mundane, insidiously advertising products or ideas, particularly in its

¹¹⁸ See Doina Lemny, *Lizica Codreanu: o dansatoare româncă în avangarda pariziană / Lizica Codreanu: A Romanian Dancer in the Parisian Avant-Garde*, Bucharest, Vellant, 2012.

¹¹⁹ Breward, *Fashion*, op.cit., p. 104.

¹²⁰ Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, op.cit., pp. 343-344.

¹²¹ Jean Mihail, *Filmul Românesc de Altădată / The Romanian Cinema of Yore*, Bucharest, Minerva, 1967, p. 7.

¹²² *Ibid*, pp. 151-155.

¹²³ See Călin Căliman, *Istoria filmului românesc: 1897-2017 / The History of Romanian Film: 1897-2017*, Bucharest, Contemporanul, 2017, pp. 98-101.

Hollywood version¹²⁴. While esteem remains the main goal of celebrity culture, its effect is not necessarily positive on the receiver. As Jean Baudrillard stated, admiration is akin to a “crime of passion” disabling any defence or response mechanism, as “an intravenous form of aggressiveness”¹²⁵. But it also leads pastiche which can then be applied to daily life as imitating a celebrity’s style and mannerisms. Anne Hollander described it as visual at its surface, as an “aesthetic act”, where the individual elements lose their intrinsic meaning, especially at a higher degree of separation¹²⁶. The visual is linked to culture theory, closer to the humanities and social sciences, than the arts or science. The attention should then include how the message is expressed, but its context needs to be properly addressed as well.

Not even the Great Depression could deter Bucharesters from organizing extravagant parties where guests also served as style icons. The *Viața Bucureșteană* (Bucharest Life) was a regular social life column in the otherwise stern daily *Adevărul*. It filled almost half of an entire newspaper page, and presented lavish events held in private or public locations, attended by the fashionable middle and even upper classes of Bucharest and, in many cases, also by foreigners. One such event was a 1931 farewell garden party held at the Manu palace for the *Association for Finance and Great Industry*. It was the last event organized by the Association for Finance and Great Industry, which had been located there. The lavish event was prepared to properly host and entertain the cream of Bucharest society and the most distinguished guests, from elegant staff and organizers, extravagant catering and a large orchestra with at least one soloist, all in a flower garden filled with roses. The reporter proceeds to describe the most famous guests and their outfits. The foreign celebrities attending the soiree preferred simple elegance. Countess Elisabeth von Biesingen wore a black printed dress, the very blonde and recently tanned Baroness Marie de Reineck, a stained-glass violet *crêpe de chine* dress. Another “very blonde” guest, the Viennese Em. Wachner, donned a pearl-grey *crêpe de chine* dress. Ms. Marthe Ladislaus Nagy de Galantha in a *marocain* ivory and

¹²⁴ Breward, *Fashion*, *op.cit.*, pp. 131-132.

¹²⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments. Cool Memories III, 1990-1995*, Emily Agar (tran), Radical Thinkers, London and New York, Verso, 2007, p. 21.

¹²⁶ Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, *op.cit.*, p. 315.

travaillé de jours, was spotted asking a young Dutchman details about Balcic, the Black Sea resort, which he misheard as this “bal chic” (chic ball). Ms. Freire de Andrade, the Portuguese commercial attaché’s wife, wore a beautiful white mousseline dress, with a wildflower bouquet (poppies, cornflowers, a daisy, and a wheat ear) pinned to her chest. The United States secretary’s wife, Cloycè Huston, with a beautiful Cuban head, had a flowing white dress. Miss Baitz de Beodra, Hungary’s military attaché’s wife, chose a flowing blue *Mélisande* dress. Polish military attaché’s wife, Ms. Jan Kowalewski, wore a delicate light blue *marocain* dress. The Mexican Ambassador’s wife, Ms. Vincente Veloz Gonzalez chose pearl grey *crêpe de chine*¹²⁷.

This physical, human dimension to garment presentation was congruent with the growing popularity of the fashion parade in the early twentieth century¹²⁸. For Anne Hollander, the main shift brought by the 1920s was the necessity to represent the subject ‘in motion’. Thinness became an unassumed, yet unavoidable prerogative, as a “dynamic, expanding outline”, with a “perpetual suggestion of all the other possible moments at which it might be seen”¹²⁹. The mannequins themselves offer a deeper dimension of interpretation. Fashion historian and theorist Caroline Evans described the early-twentieth-century fashion model as a “cipher for many of the commercial, cultural and national tensions” of the time. The mannequin’s identity also added further connotations, which were in themselves contradictory¹³⁰. The main representation techniques in figurative art became photography and cinema¹³¹, which granted a perceived realness to the pictured subject. In fashion terms, the Great Depression divided the interwar era into two fairly equal parts, each with its ideal: simplicity in the 1920s and purity for the 1930s¹³². Especially after 1929, Bucharesters were forced to care for their families,

¹²⁷ “Viața Bucureșteană” / “Bucharest Life”, in *Adevărul*. 51.16371, 15 June 1931: p. 7.

¹²⁸ Breward, *Fashion*, *op.cit.*, pp. 104-106.

¹²⁹ Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

¹³⁰ Caroline Evans, “Multiple, Movement, Model, Mode: The Mannequin Parade 1900-1929”, in Christopher Breward, Caroline Evans (eds), *Fashion and Modernity*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2005, p. 125.

¹³¹ Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, *op.cit.*, p. xi.

¹³² Bartlett, “Glitz and Restraint”, *op.cit.*, p. 433.

and to take any job they could to maintain the appearance standards required by the society, specialists, and the government. The little money they earned was likely spent on basic necessities and the rest for fashion. Because of the heavy taxation on luxury and the subsequent impossible costs for the middle class, companies, magazines and department stores awarded women's imagination in creating an elegant image with limited means or recycled materials. In February 1931, the *Trias* silks store on the merchant's street Lipscani in Bucharest published an ad specifically directed towards *Realitatea Ilustrată* and its readership. Its main idea was to highlight "a new proof" that the store sold its products "at the cheapest prices". It referred to a contest the magazine had organized for the most elegant, yet cheapest dresses, where the winner, Lily Aischeh, used fabrics purchased from *Trias*¹³³.

On a more sententious note, Jean Baudrillard juxtaposed what he termed as noble and vulgar energy as mutually exclusive. He compared the latter to "the 90 per cent of useless genes", thus implying the remainder were akin to noble energy¹³⁴. Yet Anne Hollander pointed out that comfort is only marginal in conceiving garments, both for the pre-modern voluminous fashions and their modern, much more revealing reimaginings. Clothing is thus conditioned by mental processes, rather than utilitarian necessity. Short skirts, she continued, cannot be unequivocally determined as more practical than Victorian street costumes, particularly when this "new look of fashionable immodesty" could not conceal the wearer's imperfections¹³⁵. Modern fashion introduced the unwritten rules of 'proper' and 'healthy' appearance for women, with the lack of corsets and long hoop-skirts to shape the desired silhouette, now donning less fabric over an increasingly-popular tanned skin¹³⁶. Health itself was heavily used in eugenic literature beyond its sense of optimal physique, towards connotations of national and ethnic purity. Propriety in appearance was chiefly achieved through sartorially. Even if the costume rules were not as strict as in the nineteenth century, dressing correctly by the time of day, continued to signal good etiquette.

¹³³ *Trias* Ad, *Realitatea Ilustrată*, V.212, 19 February 1931, p. 18.

¹³⁴ Baudrillard, *Fragments*, op.cit., p. 68.

¹³⁵ Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, op.cit., p. 339.

¹³⁶ See Susan J. Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body from Renaissance to Today*, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 165.

This meant women still had to change outfits every couple of hours. According to Vior, morning outfits should be simple and practical. A proper afternoon dress was the first hint of the feminine but maintaining sober charm. Its cut was more intricate, underlining the curvatures. Black was the epitome of elegance for those who could not buy twenty-odd dresses per season, it maintained a note of distinction. The accessories would be discrete, refined and delicate. Larger or more elaborate jewellery was acceptable for special occasions. The evening dress as the epitome allowed more liberty for experimentation and self-expression. Vior thought a woman in an evening dress was to give the impression of a plant that was full of life, with a stem rising to the light and sun, its gleaming corolla. This dress was the representation of its wearer's true essence. His ideal woman was like a goddess, especially in a draped gown, suggesting classical grace¹³⁷. This tendency to follow and create mythologies was also applied to the fashionable trends determined by widely celebrated archaeological discoveries. The 1920s were marked by King Tutankhamen's influence, generalised as a craze for Ancient Egypt¹³⁸. The 1930s returned to the modern interpretation of Hellenistic aesthetic norms¹³⁹, as well as to neo-Victorian designs by the end of the decade¹⁴⁰, as viewed in Vior's rhetoric.

The disseminating products and designs could be used simultaneously to traditional visual and textual representation for a wider reach. Modern marketing followed a path set by newer and emerging markets like America, which were readily adapted in the 'Old World' since the interwar era. Baudrillard contended that anti-Americanism in trade and culture was ill-advised as he believed Americanism has been rooted in "every society, every nation, and every individual today, like modernity itself"¹⁴¹. Similarly, Barthes argued that as any cultural and linguistic continuous process, fashion changes in rhythm cannot be

¹³⁷ Vior, *Fii frumoasă doamnă*, *op.cit.*, pp. 188-191.

¹³⁸ Tiffany Webber, "The Modern Era: 1910-1960", in Linda Welters, Abby Lillethun (eds), *The Fashion Reader*, Oxford, Berg, 2014, p. 88.

¹³⁹ Bartlett, "Glitz and Restraint", in *op.cit.*, p. 433.

¹⁴⁰ Mackenzie, *...isme*, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-83.

¹⁴¹ Baudrillard, *Fragments*, *op.cit.*, p. 67.

easily traced to a singular genesis, and do not belong to anyone¹⁴². Fashion novelties were promptly featured in a wide spectrum of specialised magazines or dedicated columns. Specialised magazines comprised of technical seasonal exclusive, thus costly periodicals for tailors or enthusiasts. They presented a wide variety of significant collections and glossy magazines which, for a much lower price, offered less technical details in favour of more palatable information for the larger public. The latter were late-nineteenth-century creations such as *Harper's Bazaar* (1867) or *Vogue* (1892), or early-twentieth-century ones as *Vanity Fair* (1913). While today-recognizable names like *Elle* (1945) did not yet exist, the major interwar arrivals included *Glamour* (1939) and *Esquire* (1931)¹⁴³. Fashion magazines and journals also functioned as national representation tools, habitually presenting "a certain naturalization of fashion culture". This is particularly visible in the case of Paris as depicted in the fashion press, as both a living, albeit mythical anthropomorphized character, imbued with a purported "Parisian spirit", or *esprit Parisien*¹⁴⁴. Because of all these influences, a woman with good taste was expected to discern between various sources and styles to make the right choices. The spring 1929 fashion article in *Realitatea Ilustrată*'s April 6th issue, professed this idea, with pertinent examples. The spring chesterfield aisle promoted textile overcoats like *Kasha* or *Krepella*, Moroccan wool in all shades, with the same enthusiasm as the sumptuous black silk mantles. Patterns were similarly contradictory, as the offer was both of straight lines majestically drawing the silhouette, as well as the ones frilled *en forme*¹⁴⁵. This followed a trend set by fashion articles published as early as 1923 in the *Almanach du High-Life*. It asserted that genuine thoroughbred elegance could not be achieved through visible dress alone. The quality and design of her undergarments also were a great testament of the wearer's sophistication.

¹⁴² Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, op.cit., p. 95.

¹⁴³ See Breward, *Fashion*, op.cit., p. 122.

¹⁴⁴ Agnès Rocamora, "Paris, Capitale de la Mode: Representing the Fashion City in the Media", in Christopher Breward, David Gilbert (eds), *Fashion's World Cities*, Cultures of Consumption, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2006, pp. 44-45.

¹⁴⁵ Laura, "Moda de primăvară" / "Spring Fashion", *Realitatea Ilustrată* (*The Illustrated Reality*), III.15, 6 April 1929, p. 17.

A discrete and harmonious demeanour should be coupled with self-realization and a desire for inner and outer perfection¹⁴⁶.

Continuing the late-nineteenth-century trend, the interwar era maintained its close-knit relationship with the department store. Such locations also serve as a meeting point for the consuming masses, as “fashionable spots where everyone recognizes everyone else without ever having known them”¹⁴⁷. In terms of identity, social gathering locations do not offer the opportunity to genuinely know an individual. From this point of view, the idea of ‘persona’ blends with behaviour rules to create a location- and occasion-based identity in both appearance and attitude. Outside the spaces specifically dedicated to fashion, the modern city street is an outlet for displaying, judging, and learning the latest styles. It becomes a stage, where passers-by assume the role of actors, critics, and technical staff concomitantly. The modern woman walks or drives here confidently, she is outspoken, and most importantly, she no longer needs a chaperone to protect her from the dangers of public urban spaces¹⁴⁸. Yet its interactivity, as Baudrillard argued, signals the end of the theatre spectacle as it has been understood until modernity, as a clear and necessary delineation between the actor and the public¹⁴⁹. The most important interwar Bucharest department stores were *Aux Galeries Lafayette*, affiliated to the Parisian homonymous store, *La Vulturul de Mare cu Peștele în Ghiare* (*At the Sea Eagle with the Fish in its Claws*), *Solavici* or the chains ran by Heinrich and Sigmund Prager.

Fashion oscillated between oppression and empowerment. While proponents claimed that it granted women power over their own identities and choices, detractors viewed it as a new form of patriarchal domination. Hollywood glamour played a crucial role in enforcing the former, building arguments around the claim that radiance and charm announced and assured a good future considering the bleak interwar realities¹⁵⁰. Dressing remained a moral act, and sartorial practices determined one’s state of wellbeing. For Joanne Entwistle, dress

¹⁴⁶ M.R., “La mode / Fashion”, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁷ Baudrillard, *Fragments*, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁸ Chadwick and Latimer, “Becoming Modern”, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Baudrillard, *Fragments*, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

¹⁵⁰ Dyhouse, *Glamour*, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.

illustrates how “individuals learn to live in their bodies and feel at home in them”, a fundamental catalyst and illustrator of individuality¹⁵¹. Writer Ioana Pârvulescu highlighted a perspective on the interwar moral shift in Romania expressed by historian Nicolae Iorga in 1922. He viewed the new era as a “worldwide morality crisis”, in a way prefiguring the financial crisis to come in a few years. Yet, as Pârvulescu noted, he critiqued the people bringing their perversion to the forefront, rather than the habit of hiding such traits before the 1920s.¹⁵²

Hollywood glamour and cosmopolitanism, flavoured by the *esprit Parisien*, spread widely throughout Eastern Europe. This allowed for both Romania and Latvia, for example, to designate their capitals, Bucharest and Riga, as ‘Little Paris’¹⁵³. But to gain such a designation, they had to not only attain and maintain an appearance of architectural and sartorial elegance. As women occupied some of the public space, yet were not fully integrated into the professional landscape, they became the ideal tool for the so-called ‘national propaganda’, offering a visual form of Romania’s intended representation. Elegant Bucharesters thus became a further development from the “beauty ambassador” stereotype, as they could be observed freely, by anybody in the chic, modern Bucharest locations. A sophisticated woman was expected attentively choose and adapt her style to any context and matching the person with the outfit, especially for working women. R. Vior admitted to being pleased when seeing a woman dressed in accordance to her career path or job¹⁵⁴. Vior dedicated an entire chapter for a detailed outline of the rules. It covered everything from the perfect blouse and suit types, to advice on accessories. A working woman was supposed to present herself in a clean, practical manner, through the garments and their quality. Even in an active, professional environment, women should not forget to be elegant, in Vior’s opinion, their most gracious attribute¹⁵⁵. On a more general aesthetic note, D. Theodorescu outlined the rules for combinations, synthesized in what he termed as ‘assorted contrast’.

¹⁵¹ Entwistle, “The Dressed Body”, *op.cit.*, p. 142.

¹⁵² Ioana Pârvulescu, *Întoarcere în Bucureștiul interbelic / Return to Interwar Bucharest*, București, Humanitas, 2007, p. 48.

¹⁵³ Bartlett, “Introduction”, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ Vior, *Fii frumoasă Doamnă*, *op.cit.*, p. 187.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 197-199.

Cloches only favoured thin and tall women. Those with curvier bodies were advised to avoid them, alongside ruffles, or any complicated cuts, folds, patterns or jewellery. Shoes were to be paired with the garnishes on the hat, belt, purse, dress, cape, coat, but never with those of the dress itself. D. Theodorescu also offered clarifications on the rules for matching colours. Necklaces should never have the same colour as the dress, but they can mirror its floral patterns, added lace or other decorations. If the dress merged materials, the wearer would be at liberty to pick one of the above-mentioned elements¹⁵⁶.

Consequently, fashion theory is a highly efficient tool in analysing a society and its representations: how it is seen, how it sees itself, how it wants to be seen through fashion choices. This paper's theoretical presentation outlines the turn to culture as an all-encompassing marker of identity in fashion studies. While my paper concentrated on a specific era, location and subject, my hope is that this juxtaposition will inspire researchers in the future to treat fashion with these already-established theoretical instruments. This will transcend questions of "what" and "when", and will answer a wider array, including "how", "why", or "who", as an analytical study, instead of descriptive. Romania is thus a fertile ground for fashion research, as it is rarely a main topic in specialised peer-reviewed literature.

¹⁵⁶ Theodorescu, *Călăuza croitorului*, *op.cit.*, p. 107.